

28<sup>th</sup> September 2011

THE THIRD AGE TRUST



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

# Gardening

Anthea Lock



This is just a few ideas for gardening groups who would like to meet apart from garden visits for which there is a separate section. Firstly do ask your members what they would like? Hopeless going for a really in depth talk on “Orchid Growing” if nobody is interested, a good starting point are the excellent selection of DVD’s held by the Resource Centre, maybe your own members would be prepared to show their own power point presentations of gardens they have visited. Then maybe try a local Garden Centre many have staff who are only too happy to give a short talk on House Plants and their care, always popular before Christmas and a chance to buy presents and enjoy a cup of coffee.

Talks by Speakers on different subjects are always useful try attracting Wildlife in the Garden, the great Plant Hunters, Exotic Flowers and Plants, there are so many subjects but I am sure your own members will suggest topics they want. I know it can be difficult finding Speakers at a reasonable price some volunteers from National Trust properties or retired Horticultural Tutors might be a good starting point.

Maybe your members would be prepared to do a ten minute presentation on a subject say their favourite garden or flower that they must have in their garden, you may discover a member prepared to do flower arrangements, or pressed flower pictures or cards. If you have a photography group see if a member would be prepared to give your group some hints on taking better pictures of flowers and gardens. One day when you have run out of ideas suggest that everyone takes a clean piece of paper and design the planting for a group of pots to give all the year round colour in a small courtyard, ideas will range from artificial flowers to vegetables.

Quiz’s are always popular and I am sure that you will have lots of ideas but I will have a few suggestions available by e-mail, I usually do this in groups of three or four members then nobody feels isolated and can be a good way for members to get to know each other. Plant sales or swaps the first can bring in much needed funds to pay for Speakers or room hire. Seed sharing can be beneficial and maybe a meeting spent studying different catalogues can be stimulating and encourage members to try new plants for their gardens. As so many of us are downsizing our gardens please do include ideas for window boxes especially herbs and their uses, and growing vegetables in containers maybe a competition for a photo of the most unusual container for plants.

Members money saving ideas can prove interesting, those with allotments in their area might find someone prepared to talk about their organisation, or I have found the N.G.S. County Organisers very helpful as Speakers. Another subject is the local flora and fauna and the identification of insects and butterflies. Gardening magazines can be discussed and maybe you will all discover ones they have not seen before like those sent to members of different societies.

I hope this just gives you a few ideas more suggestions will be given in the Newsletter but hopefully this will inspire those of you not yet meeting during the winter to do so.

### Garden Visits



This is only intended to give a few pointers to those who are hoping to start Garden Visits for their U3A's, and perhaps prevent too many unexpected hiccups.

Firstly don't be too adventurous by travelling too far, start with a few local ones that offer the facilities required by your group. Please do visit the garden concerned yourself to check parking, or distance from nearest bus stop and that an adequate service is running on the day of your visit. Then walk round watching for slippery paths, steep banks or steps which members might find impossible to negotiate, are there suitable toilets and can they supply tea and cake for the conclusion of your tour, also the charges. Do not rely on a report from another member as so often they can be very mobile and not realise that so many may not be able to cope with fifty steps whereas they can run up and down with ease.

If you are car sharing to a garden do decide where you are meeting and insure that there are enough cars and that everyone is willing to share the cost of the petrol, I think it is a good idea to bring this to everyone's attention and agree a price per mile to be split by all those in the vehicle well before the day. It saves embarrassment at the time if this is stated well in advance.

Should you decide to use a coach then obviously the cost will be known in advance and you must make sure all those going pay before final confirmation, as you don't want members

backing out and leaving you with a budget deficit. It is a great problem getting people to commit but no way can you expect the rest of the members to subsidise those backing out at the last minute.

I know some Group Leaders alone decide the programme of visits, larger groups might have a sub committee, smaller ones often benefit from a planning meeting when members can suggest gardens they would like to see usually in the autumn prior to the visits thus giving the organiser time to arrange with the garden owner and confirm charges etc.

Finding gardens is often quite difficult however the NGS who publish the famous yellow book is a good start, mostly these gardens welcome visits from groups, some may have a minimum number that they are prepared to open for, now all counties provide free leaflets of gardens in their area, I find the county organisers are very helpful and will often suggest gardens that might be joining the scheme. Many National Trust properties often have delightful gardens and if Head Gardeners can be persuaded to give you a guided tour these can be not only instructional but entertaining as well. Some of your members might well be prepared to allow you to visit theirs, even small gardens can prove stimulating and promote a lot of discussion.

It is often good to re-visit a favourite garden at a different time of the year, some Garden Centres and Nurseries have display beds, and if you are lucky enough to live close to a Horticultural College do contact them for advice. For those in cities local parks often have colourful displays or wildflower areas which are well worth visiting.

I know many of you run very successful visits and my congratulations to you; however this is to encourage those who have never tried this rewarding and worthwhile task to have a go.